

Rhode Island Water Resources Board Water Management System Implementation Team

Meeting Minutes Thursday, June 3, 2004

Action Items:

Change day of the meeting to Wednesday: next meeting is Wednesday, July 7, 2004.

Define terms, provide an explanation of water budgets, identify the assumptions, and try to document what the thought process is in translating the recommendations

Assemble Blackstone watershed information for July meeting.

Provide a geological summary of critical geological differences of Rhode Island; a map of water supply districts, a chart of regulatory authorities from the WAPAC Rights committee, a summary of the RI EPC Blackstone Heritage Corridor Award, and information on the EPA sole source aquifer program and definitions, and begin to identify the “governance gaps.”

Involve municipal planner from within the Blackstone Valley area for the watershed pilot study

1. Welcome and Approval of Minutes

Mr. Robert Griffith called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m. He opened the meeting by stating that the Water Resources Board Chairman, Mr. Daniel Varin, sends his regrets for not attending the meeting. Mr. Griffith noted that today’s ambitious agenda focuses on the development of a concrete and functional water management system. He asked members to refer to the Phase II chart that describes the process of developing a water management system for Rhode Island (Attachment A). A PowerPoint presentation supported the discussion. He stated the chart describes a water management framework and the purpose of today’s meeting will be to develop consensus and distill meaning to move the management framework along for action and implementation by the Board. He stated the role of the Implementation Team is to take the management framework from theory to application, and produce a product by the end of December. Turning the meeting over to Ms. Kathleen Crawley, he thanked members for their participation.

Ms. Crawley welcomed members by initiating roundtable introductions (Attachment B). She highlighted the two Brown University students, Ms. Allison Sobel and Ms. Erin Bray, who are both working on thesis research associated with Water Resources Board projects.

Ms. Crawley referred members to the Phase II Chart and Ellipsis Outcomes discussed at the May 6, 2004 meeting. She noted that the detailed discussion developed a clear consensus, and that this consensus was reflected in the minutes as described in the section entitled “Action Items.” Mr. Griffith called for approval of the May 6, 2004 meeting minutes. After discussion, Mr. Griffith noted the May 6, 2004 meeting minutes were approved as written.

2. Discussion on Tasks and Priorities

Ms. Crawley noted that the date and day of the week for meetings has been changed to the first Wednesday of the month based on request by members. After discussion, it was agreed that the next meeting will be held on Wednesday, July 7, 2004, starting at 9 a.m. Ms. Crawley stated that part of today’s work will be to identify a watershed area for a management framework pilot study. She noted that the Blackstone and the Pawcatuck USGS studies on water availability were completed or near completion. These studies would form the basis of developing a watershed water budget. Referring to the Phase II Chart, she led a discussion on tasks, priorities, and pilot study issues.

Statement: A discussion or summary on the critical geological differences would be useful to help the Team understand (groundwater) water resources and availability.

Statement: If a pilot study to develop a watershed water budget is conducted, then a municipal planner from within the watershed should participate to bring reality to our work. Mr. Griffith agreed and noted that municipal representation is critical to the overall success of the mission. Ms. Crawley stated that a deliberate public outreach effort will begin in October if members concur with the schedule. She asked Ms. Beth Collins, RI Economic Policy Council, to provide a brief summary on a Blackstone Valley outreach effort.

Ms. Collins reported that the RI Economic Policy Council, the RI Water Resources Board and the Rivers Council have formed a partnership and received Blackstone Heritage Corridor funds to engage municipal decision-makers in land use/water availability planning. The study “Balancing Water Availability and Land Development in the Blackstone Valley” plans to integrate the 2001 buildout analysis and the USGS study “Estimated Water Use and Availability in the Lower Blackstone River Basin, Northern Rhode Island and South-Central Massachusetts, 1995-99 (USGS Water Investigations Report 03-4190).” She agreed to send summary materials to the committee. She also noted a parallel project will be conducted by the RI Department of Environmental Management on urban design guidelines and use of best practices, and that the RI EPC will be working on projects in this area during the same time frame.

Statement: The minimum essential elements must be included in the water budget in order to maintain the natural hydrology and recharge necessary during the summer months. There is concern that the focus on developing water budgets at the HUC (hydrologic unit codes, sub-watershed level) 12 level across the state may not create meaningful water budgets for all watersheds. Each watershed is different.

Statement: The role of the state versus the role of the municipality is important and should be strategic. It will be important to know where to make improvements in the system.

Moderator: Ms. Crawley asked members to identify and put concerns in writing, and forward to her so that they can be included in the design of the framework. After discussion, she agreed to assemble Blackstone Valley information for the next meeting. The HUC level will be determined for each area under study.

Question: Have we agreed that the pilot study will focus on the Blackstone?

Group Discussion: What other areas have as much basic information already assembled? The Usepaug-Queen data is available but this is a small watershed. The development pressures in the Blackstone are important as this is identified as the fastest growth area. The RI EPC has initiated an economic development visioning project in the Blackstone area.

Question: What are the “governance gaps?” This would be useful information. A “full gap” analysis is needed. Landscape ordinances, plumbing and building codes should be looked at. This analysis should be conducted parallel to the Team’s work. Perhaps a sub-work group could work on this. New uses are also important. Can this be done? DEM has many regulations.

Moderator: Would you like to lead this subgroup? Do you mean “out-of-basin transfers?”

Statement: I think the analysis should focus on an analysis of municipal governance.

Statement: I caution everyone as there is no consensus on governance or lack thereof.

Mr. Griffith stated we are forging new ground so we will need to treat the category as unique and respond with “due diligence.” We will need to develop a system that addresses the issues unique to each watershed budget.

Statement: I’m not sure how we would do this as some things will not necessarily translate to a municipal level.

Response: One way to do this would be to bring the information to the municipal planners.

Moderator: It will be important to conduct an inventory of what is there as the first step.

Response: I recommend we start with an area and start to solve the problems as they arise.

Response: I am a municipal planner, and we obtain our water from out of the watershed; what is the value in developing a water budget?

Response: I agree – so how are we going to make sense of this?

Question: How meaningful will this be? What is sustainable development?

Response: I believe we can use the Usepaug-Queen study for this. We can identify how much potential water is in an area, and then weave that into the watershed for a prime figure. A better term than “municipality” might be “jurisdictional.” So the question becomes “What does it do to the watershed budget?” We can then identify within a service area, how much water is available.

Response: I agree with this statement. The real issue is local government and inserting a jurisdictional budget into the municipal budget. For example, the East Providence waterfront project hasn’t given any formal consideration of water.

Response: I guess we should look to the extreme example like Westchester County NY, as the state grows. The state will need to develop an equitable process for water. There must be a review process for development – a threshold or some hierarchy of review as various stages of population density or economic development are reached.

Statement: I understand the Phase II chart, and it is useful to see where water goes in the watershed and the state. We need information that will help decide who does what, and what are the gaps and overlaps, and how we address them.

Moderator: We do have some items about regulatory authorities from the previous work down by the Legal Rights Committee and the Drought Steering Committee. For example, we have a map of the water supply districts and a chart of regulatory authorities over water (this is not complete but it does provide some information).

Question: Can the EPA sole source aquifer program and definitions be used as a model for developing criteria? A watershed-wide process is required for designation. Can this information be distributed to members?

Statement: When we lay out the elements in the water budget we will need to identify steps to take to fit into the framework or scheme. For example, Wrentham stores for wastewater treatment v. recycling scheme. For East Providence, we can look at historical usage that would guarantee a certain gal per capita (tied to the population).

Statement: There is an expectation that water will always be available. For example, I have reviewed a water supply plan for a community that purchases a specific amount of water from the Providence Water Supply Board. There is an agreement that “guarantees” water. We need to see what has been promised, and what is actually available. There may be a large difference.

Statement: We must include minor supply and self-supplied users when calculating water availability. A municipal budget frequently crosses watershed lines, so we will need to figure out how to calculate this also. Ms. Liz Scott highlighted these comments by drawing a chart demonstrating the overlapping jurisdictional boundaries.

Statement: Water suppliers should not be put into a position where they have to say “you can’t have water.” Rather, a community element should be brought in with enforcement through the municipality or state charter.

Moderator: Staff will define terms, provide an explanation of water budgets, identify the assumptions, and try to document what the thought process is in translating the recommendations. The entire discussion speaks to the educational component of the process. We must educate ourselves as we proceed.

Statement: Storm-water management will be the responsibility of the Narragansett Bay Commission. The population has not changed much in the last 20 years. The mills are gone and residential activity has increased. Water consumption per person is pretty much 70 gal/day. We are a residential-service community and water suppliers pretty much “haul it and treat it,” and put in another well to meet the firefighting demand.

Moderator: I hope everyone has had an opportunity to read Anne Veeger’s email, a copy of which was provided as an email attachment for today’s meeting. She has identified some good questions on developing a water budget, and I will be looking for Liz, Henry, Anne and Jim to serve as a core group as we develop the water budget framework.

3. Adjournment

Mr. Griffith concluded the meeting by stating that the staff will work on developing the components of a water budget, and summarize what has been said today. A draft water budget with terms defined and assumptions stated will be prepared for the next meeting.

He thanked everyone for participating in today’s meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 7, 2004.

Respectfully Submitted,

Beverly O’Keefe
RI Water Resources Board